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# ELLERY QUEEN

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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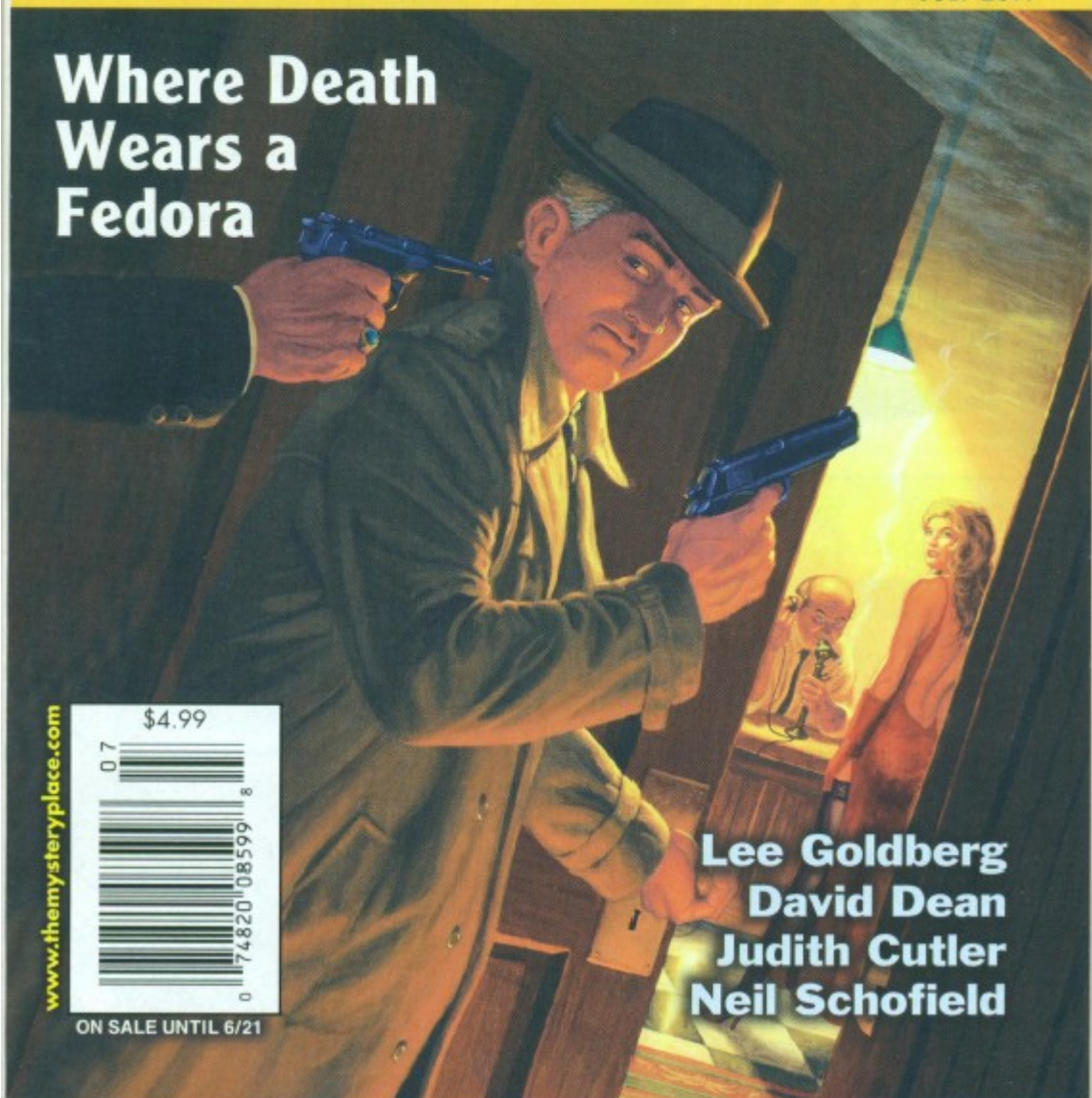
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# DUCK IN THE PUDDING

by Ulrike Rudolph

*Translated from the German by Mary Tannert*

**M**y stomach is so empty that it feels like a sock turned inside out, but I still have the urge to throw up. My head is pounding, and the jackhammer in my brain keeps drowning out my attempts to think. Every time I get close to understanding what really led to that fateful chain of events, the pain roars in like a landslide. I stare at my fingers. At least they're clean; no dark half-moons under the nails.

"Dirty nails," my mother always used to say, laughing, "are part of a healthy childhood, just like sand between the toes." A comfort, but only a small one.

The table in this room is as tidy as my hands. The surface feels cold and foreign. Strangely enough, I find this reassuring. Through a window set high up in the wall, a small strip of light falls across the linoleum floor. It reminds me of the ocean, of the North Sea when it rains, of a child's boredom and a laughing mother.

I breathe in deeply, as I always do when I'm at the sea, taking in the salt air on my nose and mouth, sticky and yet pleasantly furry. But here, all I catch is a whiff of disinfectant. I hold my breath for an instant as if I could slow down time and delay what I know will happen next.

But eventually I have to inhale, and when I do, a door opens in the opposite wall. A guard with the size and weapons of a small armory holds it so that my mother can move past him into the room. We look at one another, both of us speechless.

Born in Duisburg, Germany and educated at the University of Hamburg, Ulrike Rudolph has made a career as an editor and reviewer of non-fiction and technical literature. She is also the author of several crime novels, including a medical thriller and a young adult fantasy novel. Her short fiction has appeared in a number of magazines and anthologies. In 2008, she served on the short-fiction jury for the Glauser Awards (the distinguished German crime-fiction prize). 